

Quick Facts

About...*Staphylococcus aureus* (staph) and School Athletics

What is *Staphylococcus aureus*?

Staphylococcus aureus (staph) bacteria commonly reside on the skin or in the nose of healthy people and do not cause infection. When these bacteria enter the body through a break in the skin, they can cause mild skin infections, such as pimples, rashes, or boils. Staph can also cause serious infections, such as bloodstream and bone infections or pneumonia. Over the years, some staph bacteria have become resistant to various antibiotics. These resistant bacteria are called Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (please refer to [Quick Facts about MRSA](#)).

How is staph spread?

Most infections are spread by direct physical contact with a cut or scrape of someone who has a staph infection or by indirect contact with an inanimate object (such as towels, clothes, bandages, or sports equipment) that is soiled with wound drainage. The bacteria are not carried through the air, and they are not found in dirt or mud.

Why is an athlete at risk for staph infections?

During competition, athletes may develop abrasions or other skin trauma that can facilitate the entry of bacteria. Transmission occurs through direct contact in sports that involve frequent physical contact, e.g., football, wrestling. In sports that involve less direct contact, protective clothing may become hot and chafe the skin, resulting in abrasions, rashes, and lacerations. Athletes who share personal items or equipment that has not been cleaned place themselves and others at increased risk of contracting a staph infection.

What are the symptoms of staph infection?

Staph skin infections normally cause a red, swollen, and painful area on the skin (boil). Other symptoms include a skin abscess, drainage of pus or other fluids from the site, fever, or warmth around the infected area.

How can an ATHLETE prevent staph infections?

- Hand washing is the single most important behavior in helping to prevent infectious disease. Wash hands properly and often. (See [Quick Facts about Hand Washing](#).)
- Shower with soap after all practices and competitions.
- Do not share personal care items, such as towels, razors, soap, clothing, or uniforms.
- Keep cuts and abrasions covered with a clean, dry bandage until healed.
- Do not share ointments or antibiotics.
- Avoid contact with other athletes' infected wounds or contaminated items.
- Keep fingernails short.
- Use a skin moisturizer to prevent dry, cracked skin.
- Recognize wounds that are infected and immediately report to coaching staff.

How can a COACH prevent staph infections?

- Be a role model. Emphasize proper hand washing. Wash your hands or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer frequently.
- Promote good hygiene. Supervise showering with soap after all practices and competitions. Ensure availability of soap, hot water, and towels.

- Discourage sharing of towels, uniforms, or other personal items (razors, soap, and nail clippers).
- Establish a routine cleaning schedule for locker rooms, weight rooms, wrestling mats, and all other shared athletic equipment using either a commercial disinfectant with specific inactivation claims against staph or a fresh (daily) 1:100 dilution of sodium hypochlorite (bleach).
- Wash towels, uniforms, and any other laundry after every use in hot water and ordinary detergent. Dry thoroughly on the hottest setting.
- Assess athletes regularly for skin infections and, if needed, advise to seek treatment with their health care provider.
- Encourage athletes to self-report skin wounds or infections to the coaching staff.
- Cover all wounds. If wounds cannot be covered, exclude athletes from practice and competition.
- Maintain confidentiality of athletes with infected wounds.
- School wrestling programs should review guidance from the [National Federation of State High School Associations](#).

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information, please refer to:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/ar_mrsa_ca_public.html

Methicillin Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* among Competitive Sports Participants - Colorado, Indiana, Pennsylvania, and Los Angeles County, 2000-2003

<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5233a4.htm>

Mecklenburg County Health Department, North Carolina

Video: Prevention of MRSA in the Athletic Setting

<http://charmeck.org/Departments/Health+Department/Top+News/MRSA.htm>

Physician Release for Wrestlers to Participate with Skin Lesions

National Federation of State High School Associations

http://www.nfhs.org/core/contentmanager/uploads/Physician_release_for_wrestlers.pdf

Texas Department of State Health Services

<http://www.mrsatexas.org>

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Indiana State
Department of Health